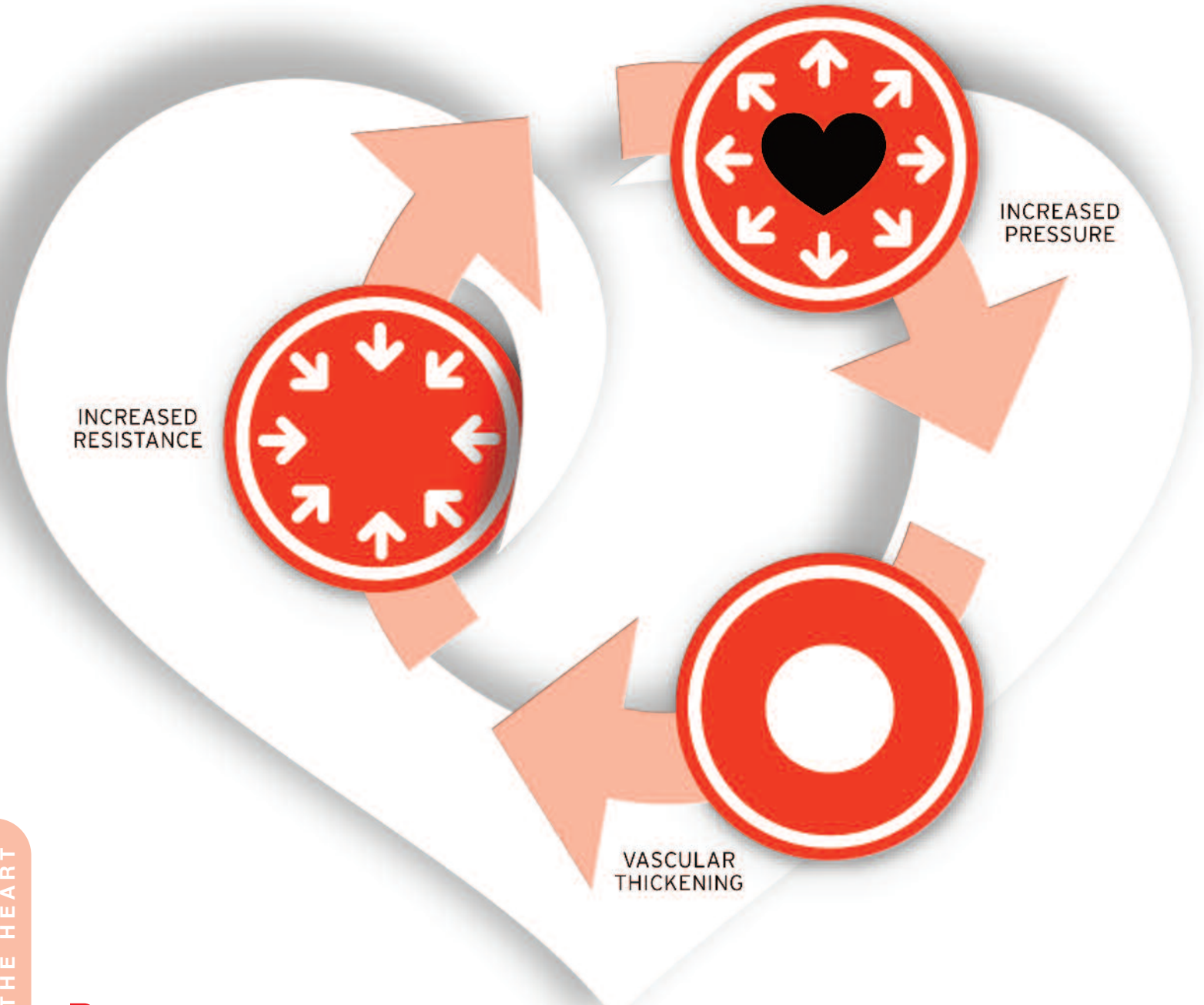


# Under Pressure



EMOTIONS OF THE HEART

**P**ulmonary hypertension, or PHT, is a disorder in which the arteries leading from the heart to the lungs become narrowed, creating high blood pressure. As the pressure builds, the right side of the heart works harder, making it expand in size and causing it to weaken. Eventually, the right ventricle will be unable to keep up and cannot pump enough blood to the lungs, potentially leading to heart failure. Though anyone can suffer pulmonary hypertension, it is more common in young

adults, and women are twice as likely to have PHT as men. Though this disorder is a serious one, symptoms may not occur or be obvious until the condition is advanced. As the illness progresses, symptoms worsen and can be fatal. There is no cure for pulmonary hypertension, but there are treatments that can reduce symptoms and improve your quality of life.

**Symptoms:** Often, symptoms of pulmonary hypertension are absent until the condition has progressed, sometimes for months or even years. Initial symptoms include shortness of breath and fatigue, so they are often dismissed by those who believe they are simply out of shape. The following symptoms may appear and worsen as the illness advances:

- Dizziness and fainting spells
- Swelling in the ankles, legs, and/or abdomen
- Chest pressure or pain
- Bluish tint to lips and skin
- Racing pulse or irregular heartbeat

**Diagnosis:** If you are experiencing symptoms of pulmonary hypertension, call 911 for immediate treatment. Your doctor will take a complete medical history. He or she will likely do a careful physical examination, which may include listening to your heart for any abnormal sounds, checking your nails for a bluish tint, examining your jugular vein for signs of enlargement, or checking for fluid retention in your legs, ankles, and abdomen. Other tests your doctor may use include blood tests, chest X-rays, an echocardiogram, chest CT scan, pulmonary angiogram, or right heart catheterization.

**Treatment:** Though there are some who develop primary pulmonary hypertension that is not accompanied by any other heart or lung conditions, secondary pulmonary hypertension is more common and is triggered by preexisting conditions such as congenital heart defects. If the underlying disease or defect can be fixed, your PHT symptoms may lessen over time. Treatment for PHT varies widely among individuals, but can include medication, diet and lifestyle changes, surgery, and regular doctor visits. For those who do not respond to medicinal therapy, lung transplantation – or heart and lung transplantation in rare cases – may be the only treatment option. There are several less drastic ways to manage pulmonary hypertension in many individuals. If you develop PHT, consider the following measures and precautions:

- **Smoking:** Quitting smoking is recommended as it complicates many heart conditions.
- **High altitudes:** Avoid situations in which your oxygen level is decreased, including high altitudes. Your doctor may recommend supplemental oxygen during air travel.
- **Exercise:** Exercise as much as you are comfortable doing. Avoid physical activities that cause symptoms, like dizziness or chest pain. Work with your doctor to create an exercise plan that works for you.
- **Pregnancy and childbirth:** It is recommended that women with PHT practice safe and effective contraception to avoid pregnancy as it can seriously endanger your life. Pregnancy creates drastic changes that affect your heart for up to six months after delivery.

